



## F1 Debrief – He’s good on track, he’s good off track

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Christine: This is F1 Debrief - He's good on track, he's good off track. On this show, we discuss the best driver of the season, who has a chance at another title and what is going on at Force India. On Sidepodcast.com this week, we published two posts reviewing the results from our Rate the Season polls and our Driver of the Season polls. On this show, we're going to focus on our driver of the season, so we're going to say what we think, we're going to have a look at what the people voted, and we're also going to talk to a guest, Adam Barton.

Mr C: Who is a legend. He is my favourite. He's Sidepodcast favourite, Adam Barton.

Christine: You'll know him as our regular feature writer, he does Class of the Field, which handily enough, reviews the driver of the race after each event.

Mr C: Basically, he knows more about drivers than we do so he is the man to speak to. In the meantime though, let's cover what we discussed in those posts on Sidepodcast. So if you haven't looked at the website, if you just listen to this podcast, give us a quick rundown of what was concluded from our polls.

Christine: We asked Sidepodcast readers to vote on their driver of the season, and the top five were Ricciardo, Hamilton, Alonso, Bottas and Rosberg, and Ricciardo absolutely stormed it, he had 41% compared to Hamilton's 23%. And I think that is right, that is accurate, well done Sidepodcast readers.

Mr C: That is a surprise to me. Am I missing something? What is it about Daniel Ricciardo that stands out so well?

Christine: He was amazing?

Mr C: He averaged across the entire season more driver of the day polls, after each race, and he took the title from the overall driver of the season and I'm not totally sure what people are seeing in him that I'm not seeing in him.

Christine: Because, he's amazing. He's the only driver not in a Mercedes to win during the year, he did overtaking all the time. He's always smiling, he also won Christine's Rankings championship this year. He's just generally an all-round good egg.

Mr C: He's good on track, he's good off track. I mean, I'm pleased that he beat Vettel, and he didn't just beat him marginally...

Christine: He beat him out of the team.

Mr C: He beat him right out of Red Bull and into Ferrari. That's no mean feat. I do not want to make light of that achievement, but I did think that Hamilton impressed me perhaps more. I think Bottas impressed me perhaps more and Fernando Alonso this year, I think is perhaps underrated by Sidepodcast readers because I thought he did an incredible job in that Ferrari. He probably saved Ferrari's credibility with his



drives. If both Ferrari drivers finished where Kimi Räikkönen finished in most races, it would have been hugely embarrassing for that team. And I think Fernando Alonso saved them in a lot of ways and therefore that shouldn't be overlooked.

Christine: The trouble is, in a season that was dominated... or so far beyond domination... by Mercedes, that any driver that managed to break through is going to get a lot of plaudits, and Ricciardo did manage to do that three times.

Mr C: He did. But then a couple of times it was failures on Mercedes part, certainly in Canada. Their mechanical reliability let him into that position. I'm not saying he didn't deserve to be there, Vettel wasn't there obviously, it was always Ricciardo that was there and of the two he was the best Red Bull driver. But you'd have to say that Bottas had a fine season, I think Massa had a great season. Massa is obviously a long underrated driver, especially in his years at Ferrari and now seems to have come out of his shell at Williams and has put in a stellar season, I thought. And perhaps deserved more than the 1% Sidepodcast readers gave him.

Christine: I am surprised that Rosberg didn't score so highly, because him being so close to Hamilton really was a surprise, and he beat him in qualifying a lot.

Mr C: Yea, well, enough to get the pole position trophy and I mean, I think Rosberg was expected to be found out this year. Going into the season, I'm sure a lot of people thought that Hamilton would dominate him, put him in the shade, and prove him to be the number two driver that he is. That didn't happen, that clearly didn't happen. Rosberg isn't another Webber. He isn't a number two driver, and he did manage to stand on his own, even if he didn't take the title.

Christine: I can understand why some people might be a bit miffed at him for his shenanigans but then again in that final race when he lost the title, he was quite magnanimous and I think rebuilt a lot of respect so it's swings and roundabouts, I'm surprised that he only got 4% of the Sidepodcast vote.

Mr C: If that's what people think, that's what people think. I cannot disagree with that many votes but I just believe that maybe some drivers are being overlooked. That's my take.

Christine: Well, you're wrong.

Mr C: Daniel Ricciardo, he was very good but I don't think he's as good as perhaps he deserves almost half the votes for driver of the day. It seems a bit one-sided to me, but that's just my take on it. We should ask Adam for his opinion, we should get Adam on the call.

Christine: Let's hear Adam's take on it.

Mr C: Yes, Adam's take on who he thinks was the shining light in 2014.

[Sweeper]

Christine: So the first question then, has to be, how did you find the season? Good, bad, somewhere in the middle?



Adam: It was good but it was just a bit of a shame that we didn't have a bit of a team rivalry. It was only ever going to be... it was all dominated by one team, so, it was a good thing that Mercedes let Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg race but aside from that, there wasn't much suspense going through the season, was there?

Mr C: And in terms of the rivalry, obviously, the Hamilton/Rosberg rivalry dominated the season. Can you recall from your columns how many, do you have stats, Christine, do you know how many times Hamilton featured versus Rosberg, in Class of the Field this year?

Christine: I don't have the official numbers but I did have a quick look through the features this year and Hamilton was there a lot more than Rosberg, definitely.

Adam: A bit of British bias there, I'm sure.

Mr C: How do you think the pair stack up?

Adam: I think the right man won in the end. Hamilton won, what was it, ten races compared to Rosberg's five, I think it was. Hamilton was better on race day, Nico Rosberg had the edge in qualifying.

Mr C: Of the two, what would you say would be the relative strengths of each driver? How is it that Rosberg is faster on Saturday and then cannot race, put in the same race performance come Sunday?

Adam: It's just a bit weird really, because before the season you would have said Nico Rosberg was the more tactical driver and Lewis Hamilton had the edge on just pure speed. And yet, Rosberg won the pole trophy and Hamilton won more races and therefore the championship. I think we saw a different side to Lewis Hamilton and the experience of being in the title fight in 2007, 2008 and to an extent in 2010 as well, sort of shone through in the end really, didn't it?

Christine: Hamilton won the season but actually in our driver of the season poll, Daniel Ricciardo came out on top, and that's something Mr C and I have been debating vigorously, whether Ricciardo actually was the best driver of the season. What do you think, does it come down to who won the championship or do other drivers get a look in?

Adam: No, I think it's good to see Ricciardo come top in that. I mean, in terms of Class of the Field as well, I tried to not focus on whoever was on the podium, sort of thing. It was more focusing on the driver that got the most out of their machinery and I think Ricciardo did do that. Look at how much better he fared than Vettel over the season, particularly when you compare it to Mark Webber's, well, the last three seasons, maybe not so much 2010, but yea, Ricciardo was just absolutely outstanding and in the title hunt un-til the last few races when he had no right to be.

Mr C: That's true. But how would you pitch him against Hamilton because surely Hamilton has to be driver of the year, he has to be driver of the season? Obviously he took the title but aside from that, he was magnificent.



Adam: But who would you have said would have won the 19 races if it was a single car formula, for example, like Formula E or IndyCar, just on genuine pace? Hamilton probably would have edged it, but that's more because of experience than raw speed I would say. Ricciardo's just shown a lot of people that he's a lot better driver than most people thought, and Red Bull got the decision right choosing him over Jean-Éric Vergne.

Mr C: They did that, yea, I can't argue with that.

Christine: Talking of Vergne, I did notice, when I was perusing your columns this year, that actually Vergne and Sergio Pérez both got quite a few mentions which came as something of a surprise to me because I hadn't really noticed them that much this year. Do you think they've been overlooked or any of the other midfield people have been overlooked?

Adam: I think Vergne got overlooked partly because the Toro Rosso was a lot worse this year than it has been in past years. He had five retirements this year and as I said the Toro Rosso wasn't so fast, so he just wasn't quite as good as he has been in the past in terms of points, but he was by far faster than Kvyat for most of the season. Maybe it was right that Toro Rosso let him go just because he's had his chance but he certainly showed potential in F1 and I think he deserved another year, maybe not in a Toro Rosso but certainly in Formula One.

Mr C: And Pérez?

Adam: It was weird because I thought that Hülkenberg would just absolutely dominate in Force India this year, and he just had a patch of form after Hungary until, for much of the rest of the year, where he just sort of fell off and Pérez was far more consistent through the season, but looking at the championship though, Hülkenberg scored more points. I just think Pérez was maybe one of the more underrated drivers of the year, and I just keep looking back and obviously Nico Hülkenberg is always seen as the next big star and yet he has no podiums in his career and Pérez has four.

Mr C: Is that true? That's a shock, I didn't realise that.

Adam: Well, Pérez had three at Sauber, didn't he, and then had the Bahrain Grand Prix this year where he beat Hülkenberg in a straight fight.

Mr C: Yes he did. When you're watching races, I know that obviously, I'm assuming you're taking notes for your column but are you actually going out of your way to pick up drivers that maybe aren't being shown on television or, how are you picking out the best performances? What is it that makes a stand out driver stand out on any given Sunday?

Adam: As I said, I do try not to go just for the people on the podium because everyone knows, everyone can see that happening. The main thing I look at is the gap to their teammate, whether they had an issue over the weekend like a ten place grid penalty, that sort of thing, just that they were by far, that they made the most of what they had for the weekend. Particularly this year, there's been a huge gap in between cars so from race to race, you may be able to finish sixth one race or twelfth the next, but if you get to that mark then that's surely a good weekend, hitting your own potential.



Mr C: You've got the new line-ups we're looking at now, there's some major changes throughout the field. Ferrari are picking up Vettel, Red Bull are losing him, you've got all change at McLaren. What's the most exciting line-up in your opinion for 2015?

Adam: I think Red Bull's is going to be quite interesting to be honest.

Mr C: Okay, how come?

Adam: Kvyat, I'm not sure if he was... he certainly was outshone by Vergne but he showed flashes of potential. I think both Red Bull and McLaren were both caught up by the Vettel/Alonso saga and it happened a year too early for them. McLaren probably wanted a year, maybe two more out of Button and likewise Red Bull wanted to groom Vergne or Kvyat for a bit longer and yet they suddenly had to bring in their younger drivers and McLaren had to end up with not enough space and have four drivers on their books that should be in F1 when they only had two spots.

Mr C: And do you think Kvyat could be a match for Ricciardo, from what you've seen from Ricciardo this year?

Adam: I don't think he can be next year, but I think he has the potential to be because Ricciardo, what has he had, he came in in 2010 so three and a half seasons under his belt before he got into Red Bull. Kvyat's only had a season, but I think he certainly has the potential and the raw speed to be a contender in years to come.

Christine: And talking of McLaren, do you think they've made the right choice with Button going for experience over youth?

Adam: I'm very happy to see Jenson back in F1 next year.

Mr C: Why?

Adam: Because he's British, he's a character as much as anything, once we lost the likes of Rubens Barrichello and Mark Webber, we need a couple of the old boys who aren't just complete media types, to make things interesting. He did outperform Magnussen, he did double his points tally, or more than double his points tally over the year and he deserves to stay in F1 but at the end of the day, there are so many drivers like Vandoorne and Magnussen who now aren't in F1 and Vergne, and really should be getting a chance to compete. It's a big problem with F1 at the moment, partly because there are only less than 22 seats next year.

Mr C: We've potentially lost two of the smaller teams, we've certainly lost Marussia, Caterham are iffy at the time of recording, could go either way. How important, or how much of a loss might that be to young drivers or will it make no difference at all given that most of the seats in the small teams are covered by pay drives anyway?

Adam: I think it's more of a loss to the sport than it is a loss to young drivers. The biggest example of a young driver in a small team is Daniel Ricciardo in an HRT and as we've seen he is a very fast driver and he just made no impression in an HRT. It may have given him a bit of an idea of the speeds and G force of an



F1 car but I think he was just as well staying in the formula he was in at the time, I think it was F3 rather than just moving into a low-range car. But, Jules Bianchi, obviously it's a bad time to talk about that, but he was showing flashes. He wasn't making that much of an impression compared to the likes of Lotus and Sauber, just because the Marussia and the Caterhams weren't fast enough. After a major rules overhaul, you'd have thought they'd be able to catch the midfield even with a lack of funding, they would be able to come up with a great idea like the F-duct was or the double diffuser and they didn't manage to. It's just a shame that they haven't been able to catch up in five seasons.

Christine: Okay, from the rear of the field, or not even on the field at all, to champions. Alonso's gone to McLaren in search of a third title, and Vettel has moved to Ferrari, presumably in search of a fifth title. Do you think either of them can do it again, or have they had their day?

Adam: I think there's the potential for them to do it, maybe not for the next couple of years. I'd be far more likely to back Vettel to win another championship than Alonso just because of the fact that Alonso's older. I think it would be the longest gap between titles if Alonso won another title, if he'd won this year, I think it would have matched Niki Lauda with seven years? No, it would have been eight years, wouldn't it, since his last title so he's still a great driver but McLaren have been struggling with the Honda over the young driver's test and I'm not sure they'll be able to catch up over the course of the year so, 2016, I'm not going to predict that just yet.

Mr C: We'll get you back before then, don't worry. But what of Vettel's chances in Ferrari, he's obviously signed a long term contract with the Italians but they are looking to be in a bit of a state right now, with the mass sackings going on in Italy right now.

Adam: It's as if they've finally realised there's a problem after four or five years, and are just panicking about it. They had to recalibrate their wind tunnel several times over the last year as well, haven't they? There's just a huge mess going on in Ferrari and they have to be brave enough to bring in someone from outside, like they did in 1996 to completely overhaul and give themselves three, four, five years to hit the front.

Mr C: Looking back on this year, on 2014, what was your highlight of 2014, what was the stand out moment when you'll look back on this season and think that was amazing, I loved that?

Adam: Well, I think, I just watched this back the other day, I think it's got to be the last ten laps or so of the Hungarian Grand Prix where you had Hamilton catching Alonso and Ricciardo catching Hamilton and Rosberg catching all three of them.

Mr C: Yep.

Adam: And just a battle to see who could maybe overtake Massa and this goes back to why Ricciardo was voted driver of the season, he was the one, well the only one, who made any progress in that.

Mr C: And it was Alonso, I mean, Alonso was well out of position. He shouldn't have had that Ferrari in a race-winning position at all this year. It was incredible to see that.



Adam: Theoretically, Ricciardo shouldn't have the Red Bull in a race winning position in Hungary, it was partly through the fact that the top four got completely screwed when the safety car came out at the start of the race, meant he got a free pit stop. Well, the top four had to make an extra pit stop, effectively. It was just a great battle and all on completely different strategies and just coming together with about five or ten laps to go to make it an absolutely fantastic race. It was one of those rare times when you genuinely had no idea how any of the podium places were going to finish.

Mr C: Fair point. I've got nothing that beats that actually, that is a highlight of 2014.

Adam: Well, I guess you could go Bahrain.

Mr C: The wheel to wheel Lewis and Nico?

Adam: And all down the field because you had a similar thing then, didn't you, with completely different strategies after a safety car and the field being condensed. From third down to about eighth or so was just wheel to wheel as well. But everyone was focusing on the top two because it was a great battle and rightly so.

Mr C: Yep. A season to remember then? At least in part.

Adam: Yea, I was going to say, in parts. I wouldn't say it was one of the best seasons, but it was certainly better than the second half of last year.

Christine: That's very true.

Mr C: That's a pretty low benchmark though.

Adam: Well, true.

Christine: So looking much further ahead, it's early days for 2015 predictions but do you have an inkling or a feeling about who is going to be champion next year or who is going to do really well?

Adam: Well, you'd have to say Mercedes have to go into it as favourites, certainly until you get to any sort of pre-season testing, just because of the fact that no one caught them over the course of a season. They're going to continue updating their car just as everyone else is. Right now, you'd have to say it's between the two Mercedes again, and I think you'd have to give the edge to Hamilton because he did win the mind games as much as anything, certainly Belgium, which I think will have an effect over the next twelve months or so. Beyond that, well, Red Bull clearly showed that they had another great chassis again as always, but Adrian Newey stepping back, I think 2015 may be the last year where we can expect the Red Bull to be the fastest around the corners if not around the track, just because of his limited involvement with the 2016 car.

Mr C: If you could pick one overlooked driver to shine next year, who is going to come to the fore, who is going to be making headlines that maybe nobody is expecting them to make?



Adam: I think it will probably be one of the Force India boys, I would have thought, but I mean, they're always there or thereabouts over the course of a season, aren't they? So, at some point surely Hülkenberg's got to live up to his potential, at least get onto the podium, hasn't he?

Mr C: Yay!

Christine: We hope.

Adam: Yes. That may be partly why people haven't, the likes of Ferrari, McLaren, haven't signed him because in crunch time, he's had chances to get podiums and it hasn't quite fallen for him. Not so much his fault, sort of thing, just the luck of the draw. But I'd say he's probably the most likely to be the overlooked driver of the year.

Mr C: Overlooked driver of the year. Okay. Thank you. Adam? I think that pretty much has wrapped up 2014, and looked forward to 2015. Can we pencil you in for some more conversations next year?

Adam: Yea, I hope so.

[Sweeper]

Christine: Brilliant to hear from Adam, to put a voice to the text.

Mr C: To the name, to the face. We've not spoken to him before and we should, well, we've corrected it now but we should have corrected it sooner. Um, where do people catch up with Adam, aside from the Class of the Field column which you can find on Sidepodcast, there will be a link in the show notes...

Christine: Always.

Mr C: How else do you catch up with Adam?

Christine: Well, he has his own blog which he writes about motorsport and more, that's at [abarton93.blogspot.co.uk](http://abarton93.blogspot.co.uk), and you can follow him on Twitter @abarton93.

Mr C: Fantastic, and if anyone disagrees or maybe agrees with anything we said on this show, how might listeners give us feedback?

Christine: There are so many ways. Your first port of call has to be [sidepodcast.com/contact](http://sidepodcast.com/contact) where there is a contact form, you can get us on Twitter @sidepodcast or email me [christine@sidepodcast.com](mailto:christine@sidepodcast.com). The possibilities are endless, call us 0121 28 87225, leave us a voicemail, let us know whether you agree with us or disagree with us, whether you agree with Adam or disagree with him.

Mr C: Okay, next show up actually is a feedback show, so make sure you get your responses in quickly because there's a fast turnaround on these shows over this period and we will try and feature as many responses as possible.